Ray Bradbury Short Story Notes

The Night

- About a young boy and his mother who go out at night looking for his brother when he does not come home on time
- The mood throughout the story changes from peaceful and warm, to fearful and tense - even after he finds his brother. As the mother (the person the boy most looks up to) gets more fearful, the mood becomes darker and he becomes more and more scared
- There were some symbols throughout the short story:
    - The night - fear and the unknown
    - The Ravine - death and danger
    - The German Baptist Church (empty and dark at night) - safety and morality and protection, but in the moment it fails to comfort him
    - The crickets and the silence help build the suspense
    - The mothers trembling hand symbolizes the child's loss of innocence
- Theme: Growing up involves realizing that the world is not always completely safe and that even adults and our parents cannot protect us from every fear
- *Time & Space*
    - The story starts off stating that it is set in a small town in 1927 on a warm summer night.
    - The time period matters because there is less technology and fewer ways to immediately contact people, so the mother and boy are more isolated and scared
- *Identity*
    - The main character is a young boy who sees his mother as strong and protective
    - At the beginning his identity is based on being safe, loved, and dependant on adults
    - But when he feels his mothers hands tremble, he realizes that adults can also be afraid
        - This changes how he understands himself and the world
- *Transformation*
    - The biggest transformation is internal
    - The boy moves from innocence to awareness
    - Skipper (the brother) comes home safely, so the external problem is solved, but the child has still changed. He now understands fear, death, and loneliness in a deeper way
- *Creativity*
    - Bradbury uses third person narration, which makes the reader feel like they are the child and are experiencing the same emotions
    - Bradbury also added lots of vivid imagery, which makes the reader more immersed and makes it feel more real and personal

Lets Play Poison

- The short story starts with a shocking event: a group of children pushing a boy named Michael out of a school window, and he dies
- Mr. Howard, the teacher, is traumatized and stops teaching for seven years until he returns for a couple weeks as substitute for his friend
- He is very fearful of the children, and they play a game called “Poison”, where pavement marking become graves/poison you
- Mr. Howard mocks this, but at the end gets poisoned and is buried under the cement
- Symbols:
    - Game “Poison” - childhood play mixed with death and cruelty
    - Cement - hidden truth and hidden death
    - Skull - death and foreshadows Mr. Howard’s fate
    - Autumn (season) - decay and endings
- Theme: Childhood innocence can sometimes hide their cruelty, and adults can sometimes excuse children too much which leads them to doing awful things
- *Time & Space*
    - Small town neighborhood
    - Autumn season, creating a feel of decay, endings, and death
    - Pavement and excavation have hidden violence
- *Identity*
    - Mr. Howard's identity becomes shaped by trauma
    - Children as monsters and devils instead of students
- *Transformation*
    - Mr. Howard changes from a teacher into a fearful, paranoid man
    - The children transform into deadly people instead of innocent, sweet kids
- *Creativity*
    - Bradbury takes a simple childhood game and turns it into horror

All Summer in a Day

- Story set in Venus, where it rains constantly and the sun only appears for a short time every seven years
- The children are excited to see the sun, but Margot is from Earth and remembers the sun
- The other children are jealous of her and bully her
- They lock her in a closet before the sun comes out
- When the children enjoy the sun for the few moments its there, after its gone and it starts raining, they remember Margot is still locked away
- They do have a sense of apology, realizing that they made her miss the sun for seven more years
- The mood begins as excited and tense, then becomes cruel and unfair when Margot is locked in the closet. When the sun comes out, the mood becomes joyful and beautiful. At the end, the mood becomes guilty, sad, and regretful
- Theme: Jealousy and group cruelty can cause serious harm, especially when people punish someone for being different
- *Time & Space*
    - The Venus setting

    - The constant rain make it feel gloomy
    - The sun once in seven years is very precious
- *Identity*
    - Margot's identity is based on memory
    - She remembers Earth and the sun, which makes her different from the others
- *Creativity*
    - Bradbury uses science fiction to tell a realistic story about bullying
    - Margot's poem also shows how creativity preserves memory

Zero Hour

- Children playing a game called "Invasion", but the game turns out to be real
- Mink and other young children helped an alien named Drill enter Earth
- The adults think it's just pretend, but Mrs. Morris slowly begins to notice clues
- At 5 o'clock the invasion begins, Mrs. Morris and her husband hide in the attic, but Mink leads the aliens to them as says "Peekaboo"
- Mood: Starts playful and energetic, but it slowly becomes suspicious and tense. By the end, the mood is terrifying.
- Symbols:
    - The game "Invasion" symbolizes danger disguised as play
    - Drill symbolizes manipulation and hidden evil
    - The yo-yo symbolizes childhood play becoming real power
    - Five o'clock/zero hour symbolizes the moment when pretend becomes reality
    - Peekaboo symbolizes childhood innocence being turned into horror
- Theme: Adults are vulnerable when they underestimate children and dismiss imagination as harmless.
- *Intertextuality*
    - "Zero Hour" and "Lets Play Poison" both symbolize how children can be evil, and parents don't pay attention to the signs or the children, leading them to be hurt by them
- *Time & Space*
    - The futuristic suburban setting shows that even advanced societies can still be unsafe
    - The danger starts in ordinary places like lawns and homes
- *Identity*
    - Younger children are defined by imagination and belief
    - Adults are defined by logic and skepticism
    - Mink's identity changes from daughter to collaborator with the aliens
- *Transformation*
    - A game transforms into a real invasion
    - The home transforms from a safe space into a trap
    - Mrs. Morris transforms from amused to terrified
- *Creativity*
    - The children's creativity allows them to build devices and help Drill
    - Bradbury shows creativity as powerful but dangerous

The Small Assassin

- Alice gives birth to a baby, but she hates him and think that the baby is trying to murder her
- At first, everyone just thinks that Alice is traumatized by the child birth and struggling with motherhood
- Her husband David and Dr. Jeffers both try to explain her fears as physiological
- But strange things start happening, like the baby seeming away at night, and a toy being left on the stairs that David almost slips on
- Alice dies one day by slipping down the stairs, and David notices that she slipped on the baby's same toy he almost did
- David dies from gas in his room
- At the end, Dr. Jeffers find the crib empty and realizes that the baby may actually be dangerous
- Mood: Paranoid, creepy, suspenseful, and horrifying. Bradbury makes normal things like a baby crying, a toy on the stairs, and a nursery feel threatening.
- Symbols
    - Baby - innocence turned into danger
    - Toy - childhood innocence becoming a weapon
    - Nursery - a place that should be safe and soothing but becomes frightening
    - Scalpel - medicine and adult authority becoming violent
    - Lucifer - evil and connects the baby to the devil
- Theme: Innocence can be deceptive. Something that looks harmless may still be dangerous. It also shows how fear can isolate people when no one believes them.
- *Time & Space*
    - Places of usually safety, birth, family, and care (hospital, family home, nursery)
    - Becomes places of murder and fear
- *Identity*
    - Alice is expected to become a loving mother, but she cannot because she fears the baby
    - David is also seen as changing from a happy new father to terrified
    - Dr. Jeffers begins as a logical doctor, but by the end even questions if the baby is evil
    - The baby's identity is the most disturbing because he looks like a helpless infant, but may actually be a murderer
- *Transformation*
    - Alice changes from new mother to victim
    - David changes from skeptical father to someone who believes that the baby is evil
    - Dr. Jeffers changes from rational doctor to someone willing to kill the baby
    - The baby also transforms in the reader’s mind from an innocent infant to a possible assassin
- *Creativity*
    - Bradbury creatively turns ordinary parts of family life into horror
    - A baby crying, a toy on the stairs, and a nursery are usually normal, but he makes them frightening
    - He also uses ambiguity so the reader has to question whether the baby is truly evil or whether the adults are losing their minds

Intertextuality Between all 5 Bradbury Short Stories

- All five short stories question the idea that childhood is automatically innocent to adults, and adults ignore them/their evil capabilities
    - Bradbury shows children as playful and imaginative, but also capable of fear, cruelty, selfishness, or danger
- Bradbury turns ordinary childhood things into something darker: bedtime fear in “The Night,” playground games in “Let’s Play ‘Poison,’” school bullying in “All Summer in a Day,” pretend invasion games in “Zero Hour,” and babies/toys in “The Small Assassin”
- Adults often misunderstand or underestimate children
    - They either think children are harmless, ignore their cruelty, or dismiss their imagination as “just pretend
- The stories all connect to "Childhood's End” because someone loses a comforting belief about childhood
    - Children learn fear or guilt, and adults realize children may not be as innocent or safe as they assumed
- Bradbury uses fear and imagination across the stories
    - Childhood imagination can create wonder, but it can also become dangerous when mixed with jealousy, cruelty, or misunderstanding
- The stories highlight that growing up means realizing the world is more complicated than it first seems, and that innocence can disappear suddenly